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bridge of stone ever erected on it. From Pembridge's Annals, as published by the Father of British antiquaries, William Camden, we learn that this bridge was erected in the year 1308, by John le Decer, the Mayor of Dublin in that year, at his own expense. So that by a curious and not uninteresting coincidence, it owes its erection to one worthy and patriotic citizen of Dublin, and its preservation, after a lapse of more than five hundred years, to another.

New Bridge is situated in the barony of North Salt, about one Irish mile south-west of the town of Leixlip. It consists of four arches, some of which are semicircular and others pointed; and, like most ancient bridges, it is high and extremely narrow. Mantled with luxuriant ivy, and enriched with the varied and mellow tints of so many centuries, it is in itself an object of great picturesque beauty; but these attractions are greatly enhanced by the quiet yet romantic features of the scenery immediately about it—particularly the woods and the ruins of the venerable Abbey of St Woolstan, of which we shall give some account in a future number.

P.

## ANCIENT IRISH LITERATURE.

### NUMBER III.

FOR our third specimen of the literature of our ancestors we have selected an example of what may be called the fireside stories, in vogue from a very ancient period till the last century. These stories are for the most part only personal traditions, and as they are not found in any vellum manuscripts which have descended to us, it might be concluded that they are of very modern date. Such conclusion, however, would be erroneous: there is no doubt that in their groundwork at least they are of an antiquity of several centuries, although modified in their language and allusions in conformity with the changes in manners and customs of succeeding times. The personages who figure in them are always either historical, or belonging to the ancient mythology of Ireland, and they are well worthy of preservation, for the light which they reflect on the habits of thought, as well as the manners and customs of bygone times.

## BODACH AN CHOTA-LACHTNA, OR THE CLOWN WITH THE GREY COAT,

### A FENIAN TALE.

ON a certain day a fair and a gathering were held at Bineadar, by the seven ordinary and seven extraordinary battalions of the Fenians of Erin. In the course of the day, on casting a look over the broad expanse of the sea, they beheld a large, smooth-sided, and proud-looking ship ploughing the waves from the east, and approaching them under full sail. When the capacious vessel touched the shore and lowered her sails, the Fenians of Erin counted upon seeing a host of men disembark from her; and great was their surprise when one warrior, and no more, came out of the ship and landed on the beach. He was a hero of the largest make of body, the strongest of champions, and the finest of the human race; and in this wise was the kingly warrior equipped:—an impenetrable helmet of polished steel encased his ample and beautiful head; a deep-furrowed, thick-backed, sharp-edged sword hung at his left side; and a purple bossed shield was slung over his shoulder. Such were his chief accoutrements; and armed in this fashion and manner did the stranger come into the presence of Finn Mac Coole and the Fenians of Erin.

It was then that Finn, the King of the Fenians, addressed the heroic champion, and questioned him, saying, "From what quarter of the globe hast thou come unto us, O goodly youth? or from which of the noble or ignoble races of the universe art thou sprung? Who art thou?"

"I am," answered the stranger, "Ironbones, the son of the King of Thessaly; and so far as I have travelled on this globe, since the day that I left my own land, I have laid every country, peninsula, and island, under contribution to my sword and my arm: this I have done even to the present hour; and my desire is to obtain the crown and tribute of this country in like manner: for if I obtain them not, I purpose to bring slaughter of men and deficiency of heroes and youthful warriors on the seven ordinary and seven extraordinary battalions of the Fenian host. Such, O king, is the object of my visit to this country, and such is my design in landing here."

Hereupon uprose Conán the Bald, and said, "Of a truth, my friend, it seems to me that you have come upon a foolish

enterprise, and that to the end of your life, and the close of your days, you will not be able to accomplish your purpose; because from the beginning of ages until now, no man ever heard of a hero or ever saw a champion coming with any such mighty design to Ireland, who did not find his match in that same country."

But Ironbones replied: "I make but very little account of your speech, Conán," said he: "for if all the Fenian heroes who have died within the last seven years were now in the world, and were joined by those who are now living, I would visit all of them with the sorrow of death and show all of them the shortness of life in one day; nevertheless I will make your warriors a more peaceable proposal. I challenge you then, O warriors, to find me a man among you who can vanquish me in running, in fighting, or in wrestling; if you can do this, I shall give you no further trouble, but return to my own country without loitering here any longer."

"And pray," inquired Finn, "which of those three manly exercises that you have named will it please you to select for the first trial of prowess?"

To this Ironbones answered, "If you can find for me any one champion of your number who can run faster than I can, I will give you no further annoyance, but depart at once to my own country."

"It so happens," said Finn, "that our Man of Swiftess, Keelte Mac Ronan, is not here at present to try his powers of running with you; and as he is not, it were better, O hero, that you should sojourn here a season with the Fenians, that you and they may mutually make and appreciate each other's acquaintance by means of conversation and amusements, as is our wont. In the meanwhile I will repair to Tara of the Kings in quest of Keelte Mac Ronan; and if I have not the good fortune to find him there, I shall certainly meet with him at Ceis-Corann of the Fenii, from whence I shall without delay bring him hither to meet you."

To this Ironbones agreed, saying that he was well satisfied with what Finn proposed; and thereupon Finn proceeded on his way towards Tara of the Kings, in search of Keelte. Now, it fell out that as he journeyed along he missed his way, so that he came to a dense, wide, and gloomy wood, divided in the midst by a broad and miry road or pathway. Before he had advanced more than a very little distance on this road, he perceived coming directly towards him an ugly, detestable looking giant, who wore a grey frize coat, the skirts of which reached down to the calves of his legs, and were bespattered with yellow mud to the depth of a hero's hand; so that every step he made, the lower part of that coat struck with such violence against his legs as to produce a sound that could be distinctly heard a full mile of ground off. Each of the two legs that sustained the unwieldy carcass of this horrible hideous monster was like the mast of a great ship, and each of the two shoes that were under his shapeless, horny, long-nailed hoofs, resembled a roomy long-sided boat; and every time that he lifted his foot, and at every step that he walked, he splashed up from each shoe a good barrelful of mire and water on the lower part of his body. Finn gazed in amazement at the colossal man, for he had never before seen any one so big and bulky; yet he would have passed onward and continued his route, but the giant stopped and accosted him, and Finn was under the necessity of stopping also, and exchanging a few words with the giant.

The giant began in this manner:—"What, ho! Finn Mac Coole," said he, "what desire for travelling is this that has seized on you, and how far do you mean to go upon this journey?"

"Oh," said Finn, "as to that, my trouble and anxiety are so great that I cannot describe them to you now, and indeed small is the use," added he, "it would be of to me to attempt doing so; and I think it would be better for you to let me go on my way without asking any more questions of me."

But the giant was not so easily put off. "O Finn," said he, "you may keep your secret if you like, but all the loss and the misfortune attending your silence will be your own; and when you think well upon that, maybe you would not boggle any longer about disclosing to me the nature of your errand."

So Finn, seeing the huge size of the giant, and thinking it advisable not to provoke him, began to tell him all that had taken place among the Fenians of Erin so short a time before. "You must know," said he, "that at the meridian hour of this very day the great Ironbones, the son of the King of Thessaly, landed at the harbour of Bineadar, with

the view of taking the crown and sovereignty of Ireland into his own hands; and if he does not obtain them with the free and good will of the Irish, he threatens to distribute death and destruction impartially among the young and old of our heroes; howbeit he has challenged us to find a man able to surpass him in running, fighting, or wrestling, and if we can find such a man, then he agrees to forego his pretensions, and to return to his own country without giving us further trouble; and that," said Finn, "is the history that I have for you."

"And how do you intend to oppose the royal warrior?" asked the giant; "I know him well, and I know he has the vigour in his hand and the strength in his arm to carry every threat he makes into effect."

"Why, then," said Finn, in answer to this, "I intend to go to Tara of the Kings for Keelte Mac Ronan, and if I do not find him there, I will go to look for him at Ceis-Corann of the Fenii; and it is he," said he, "whom I mean to bring with me for the purpose of vanquishing this hero in running."

"Alas!" said the giant, "weak is your dependence and feeble your champion for propping and preserving the monarchy of Ireland; and if Keelte Mac Ronan be your *Tree of Defiance*, you are already a man without a country."

"It is I, then," said Finn, "who am sorry you should say so; and what to do in this extremity I cannot tell."

"I will show you," replied the gigantic man: "just do you say nothing at all but accept of me as the opponent of this champion; and it may happen that I shall be able to get you out of your difficulty."

"O," said Finn, "for the matter of that, it is my own notion that you have enough to do if you can carry your big coat and drag your shoes with you one half mile of ground in a day, without trying to rival such a hero as Ironbones in valour or agility."

"You may have what notions you like," returned the giant, but I tell you that if I am not able to give battle to this fighting hero, there never has been and there is not now a man in Ireland able to cope with him. But never mind, Finn Mac Coole, let not your spirits be cast down, for I will take it on myself to deliver you from the danger that presses on you."

"What is your name?" demanded Finn.

"Bodach-an-Chota-Lachtna (the Churl with the Grey Coat) is my name," the giant answered.

"Well, then," said Finn, "you will do well to come along with me." So Finn turned back, and the Bodach went with him; but we have no account of their travels till they reached Bineadar. There, when the Fians beheld the Bodach attired in such a fashion and trim, they were all very much surprised, for they had never before seen the like of him; and they were greatly overjoyed that he should make his appearance among them at such a critical moment.

As for Ironbones, he came before Finn, and asked him if he had got the man who was to contend with him in running. Finn made answer that he had, and that he was present among them; and thereupon he pointed out the Bodach to him. But as soon as Ironbones saw the Bodach, he was seized with astonishment, and his courage was damped at the sight of the gigantic proportions of the mighty man, but he pretended to be only very indignant, and exclaimed, "What! do you expect me to demean myself by engaging in a contest with such an ugly, greasy, hateful-looking Bodach as that? It is myself that will do no such thing!" said he; and he stepped back and would not go near the Bodach.

When the Bodach saw and heard this, he burst into a loud, hoarse, thunderous laugh, and said, "Come, Ironbones, this will not do; I am not the sort of person you affect to think me; and it is you that shall have proof of my assertion before to-morrow evening; so now, let me know," said he, "what is to be the length of the course you propose to run over, for over the same course it is my own intention to run along with you; and if I do not succeed in running that distance with you, it is a fair conclusion that you win the race, and in like manner if I do succeed in outstripping you, then it stands to reason that you lose the race."

"There is sense and rationality in your language," replied Ironbones, for he saw that he must submit, "and I agree to what you say, but it is my wish not to have the course shorter or longer than three score miles."

"Well," said the Bodach, "that will answer me too, for it is just three score miles from Mount Loocra in Munster to Bineadar; and it will be a pleasant run for the pair of us; but if you find that I am not able to finish it before you, of course the victory is yours."

Ironbones replied that he would not contradict so evident a proposition, whereupon the Bodach resumed: "What it is proper for you to do now," said he, "is to come along with me southward to Mount Loocra this evening, in order that we may make ourselves acquainted with the ground we are to go over to-morrow on our return; and we can stop for the night on the Mount, so that we may be able to start with the break of day." To this also Ironbones acceded, saying it was a judicious speech, and that he had nothing to object to it.

Upon this the two competitors commenced their journey, and little was the delay they made until they arrived at Mount Loocra in Munster. As soon as they had got thither, the Bodach again addressed Ironbones, and told him that he thought their best plan would be to build a hut in the adjoining wood, that so they might be protected from the inclemency of the night: "for it seems to me, O son of the King of Thessaly," said he, "that if we do not, we are likely to have a hard couch and cold quarters on this exposed hill."

To this Ironbones made reply as thus: "You may do so, if you please, O Bodach of the Big Coat, but as for me, I am Ironbones, and care not for dainty lodging; and I am mightily disinclined to give myself the trouble of building a house hereabouts only to sleep in it one night and never see it again; howbeit, if you are desirous of employing your hands there is nobody to cross you; you may build, and I shall stay here until you have finished."

"Very good," said the Bodach, "and build I will; but I shall take good care that a certain person who refuses to assist me shall have no share in my sleeping-room, should I succeed in making it as comfortable as I hope to do;" and with this he betook himself into the wood, and began cutting down and shaping pieces of timber with the greatest expedition, never ceasing until he had got together six pair of stakes and as many of rafters, which with a sufficient quantity of brushwood and green rushes for thatch, he carried, bound in one load, to a convenient spot, and there set them up at once in regular order; and this part of his work being finished, he again entered the wood, and carried from thence a good load of dry green sticks, which he kindled into a fire that reached from the back of the hut to the door.

While the fire was blazing merrily he left the hut, and again addressing his companion, said to him, "O son of the King of Thessaly, called by men Ironbones, are you provided with provisions for the night, and have you eatables and drinkables to keep you from hunger and thirst?"

"No, I have not," said Ironbones proudly; "it is myself that used never to be without people to provide victuals for me when I wanted them," said he.

"Well, but," said the Bodach, "you have not your people near you now, and so the best thing you can do is to come and hunt with me in the wood, and my hand to you, we shall soon have enough of victuals for both of us."

"I never practised pedestrian hunting," said Ironbones; "and with the like of you I never hunted at all; and I don't think I shall begin now," said he, in a very dignified sort of way.

"Then I must try my luck by myself," said the Bodach; and off again he bounded into the wood, and after he had gone a little way he roused a herd of wild swine and pursued them into the recesses of the wood, and there he succeeded in separating from the rest the biggest and fattest hog of the herd, which he soon ran down and carried to his hut, where he slaughtered it, and cut it into two halves, one of which he placed at each side of the fire on a self-moving holly-spit. He then darted out once more, and stopped not until he reached the mansion of the Baron of Inchiquin, which was thirty miles distant, from whence he carried off a table and a chair, two barrels of wine, and all the bread fit for eating he could lay his hands on, all of which he brought to Mount Loocra in one load. When he again entered his hut, he found his hog entirely roasted and in nice order for mastication; so he laid half the meat and bread on the table, and sitting down, disposed of them with wonderful celerity, drinking at the same time precisely one barrel of the wine, and no more, for he reserved the other, as well as the rest of the solids, for his breakfast in the morning. Having thus finished his supper, he shook a large bundle of green rushes over the floor, and laying himself down, soon fell into a comfortable sleep, which lasted until the rising of the sun next morning.

As soon as the morning was come, Ironbones, who had got neither food nor sleep the whole night, came down from the mountain's side and awoke the Bodach, telling him that it was

time to commence their contest. The Bodach raised his head, rubbed his eyes, and replied, "I have another hour to sleep yet, and when I get up I have to eat half a hog and drink a barrel of wine; but as you seem to be in a hurry, you have my consent to proceed on your way before me: and you may be sure I will follow you." So saying, he laid his head down and fell again a-snoring; and upon seeing this, Ironbones began the race by himself, but he moved along heavily and dispiritedly, for he began to have great dread and many misgivings, by reason of the indifference with which the Bodach appeared to regard the issue of the contest.

When the Bodach had slept his fill he got up, washed his hands and face, and having placed his bread and meat on the table, he proceeded to devour them with great expedition, and then washed them down with his barrel of wine; after which he collected together all the bones of the hog and put them into a pocket in the skirt of his coat. Then setting out on his race in company with a pure and cool breeze of wind, he trotted on and on, nor did he ever halt on his rapid course until he had overtaken Ironbones, who with a dejected air and drooping head was wending his way before him. The Bodach threw down the bare bones of the hog in his path, and told him he was quite welcome to them, and that if he could find any pickings on them he might eat them, "for," said he, "you must surely be hungry by this time, and myself can wait until you finish your breakfast."

But Ironbones got into a great passion on hearing this, and he cried, "You ugly Bodach with the Big Coat, you greasy, lubberly, uncouth tub of a man, I would see you hanged, so I would, before you should catch me picking such dirty common bones as these—hogs' bones, that have no meat on them at all, and have moreover been gnawed by your own long, ugly, boarish tusks."

"O, very well," replied the Bodach, "then we will not have any more words about them for bones; but let me recommend to you to adopt some more rapid mode of locomotion, if you desire to gain the crown, sovereignty, and tributes of the kingdom of Ireland this turn, for if you go on at your present rate, it is second best that you will be after coming off, I'm thinking." And having so spoken, off he darted as swift as a swallow, or a reebuck, or a blast of wind rushing down a mountain declivity on a March day, Ironbones in the meantime being about as much able to keep pace with him as he was to scale the firmament; nor did he check his own speed until he had proceeded thirty miles on the course. He then stopped for a while to eat of the blackberries which grew in great abundance on the way, and while he was thus employed, Ironbones came up with him and spoke to him. "Bodach," said he, "ten miles behind us I saw one skirt of your grey coat, and ten miles farther back again I saw another skirt; and it is my persuasion, and I am clearly of the opinion, that you ought to return for these two skirts without more to do, and pick them up."

"Is it the skirts of this big coat that I have on me you mean?" asked the Bodach, looking down at his legs.

"Why, to be sure it is them that I mean," answered Ironbones.

"Well," said the Bodach, "I certainly must get my coat skirts again; and so I will run back for them if you consent to stop here eating blackberries until I return."

"What nonsense you talk!" cried Ironbones. "I tell you I am decidedly resolved not to loiter on the race; and my fixed determination is not to eat any blackberries."

"Then move on before me," said the Bodach, upon which Ironbones pushed onward, while the Bodach retraced his steps to the different spots where the skirts of his coat were lying, and having found them and tacked them to the body of the coat, he resumed his route and again overtook Ironbones, whom he thus addressed: "It is needful and necessary that I should acquaint you of one thing, O Ironbones, and that is, that you must run at a faster rate than you have hitherto used, and keep pace with me on the rest of the course, or else there is much likelihood and considerable probability that the victory will go against you, because I will not again have to go back either for my coat-skirts or anything else;" and having given his companion this warning, he set off once more in his usual manner, nor did he stop until he reached the side of a hill, within ten miles of Bineadar, where he again fell a-plucking blackberries, and ate an extraordinary number of them. When he could eat no more, his jaws being tired and his stomach stuffed, he took off his great coat, and handling his needle and thread, he sewed it into the form of a ca-

pacious sack, which he filled with blackberries; this he slung over his shoulders, and then off he scampered for Bineadar, greatly refreshed, and with the speed of a young buck.

In the meantime Finn and his troops were awaiting in great doubt and dread the result of the race, though, without knowing who the Bodach was, they had a certain degree of confidence in him; and there was a champion of the Fenians on the top of the Hill of Howth, who had been sent thither by Finn, and had been there from an early hour of the morning to see which of the competitors would make his appearance first in view. When this man saw the Bodach coming over the nearest eminence, with his heavy burden on his back, he thought that to a certainty it was Ironbones whom he beheld, and fled back quite terrified to Finn and the troops, telling them Ironbones was coming up, carrying the Bodach dead over his shoulders. This news at first depressed Finn and the troops; but Finn by and bye exclaimed, "I will give a suit of armour and arms to the man who brings me better news than that!" whereupon one of the heroes went forth, and he had not proceeded far when he espied the Bodach advancing towards the outposts of the troops, and knowing him at a glance, he flew back to Finn and announced to him the glad tidings.

Finn thereupon went joyfully out to meet the Bodach, who speedily came up and threw down his burden, crying out aloud, "I have good and famous news for all of you; but," added he, "my hunger is great, and my desire for food pressing; and I cannot tell you what has occurred until I have eaten a very large quantity of oatmeal and blackberries. Now, as for the latter, that is, the blackberries, I have got them myself in this big sack, but the oatmeal I expect to be provided for me by you; and I hope that you will lose no time in getting it, and laying it before me, for I am weak for the want of nutriment, and my corporeal powers are beginning to be exhausted." Upon hearing this Finn replied that his request should be at once attended to, and in a little space of time, accordingly, there was spread under the Bodach a cloth of great length and breadth, with a vast heap of oatmeal in the middle of it, into which the Bodach emptied out all the blackberries in his bag; and having stirred the entire mass about for some time with a long pole, he commenced eating and swallowing with much vigour and determination.

He had not been long occupied in this way before he descried Ironbones coming towards the troops with his hand on the hilt of his sword, his eyes flaming like red coals in his head, and ready to commence slaughtering all before him because he had been vanquished in the contest. But he was not fated to put his designs into execution, for when the Bodach saw what wickedness he had in his mind, he took up a handful of the oatmeal and blackberries, and dashing it towards Ironbones with an unerring aim, it struck him so violently on the face that it sent his head spinning through the air half a mile from his body, which fell to the ground and there remained writhing in all the agonies of its recent separation, until the Bodach had concluded his meal. The Bodach then rose up and went in quest of the head, which after a little searching about he found; and casting it from his hands with an unerring aim, he sent it bowling along the ground all the half mile back again, until coming to the body it stopped and fastened itself on as well as ever, the only difference being that the face was now turned completely round to the back of the neck, while the back of the head was in front.

The Bodach having accomplished this feat much to his satisfaction, now grasped Ironbones firmly by the middle, threw him to the ground, tied him hand and foot so that he could not stir, and addressed him in these words: "O Ironbones, justice has overtaken you: the sentence your own vain mind had passed on others is about to be pronounced against yourself; and all the liberty that I feel disposed to leave you is the liberty of choosing what kind of death you think it most agreeable to die of. What a silly notion you did get into your noddle, surely, when you fancied that you, single-handed, could make yourself master of the crown, sovereignty, and tributes of Ireland, even though there had been nobody to thwart your arrogant designs but myself! But take comfort and be consoled, for it shall never be said of the Fians of Ireland that they took mortal vengeance on a single foe without any warriors to back him; and if you be a person to whom life is a desirable possession, I am willing to allow you to live, on condition that you will solemnly swear by the sun and moon that you will send the chief tributes of Thessaly every year to Finn Mac Coole here in Ireland."